AD VATVCA - Why Aduatuca and Vatican Are the Same Word

Julius Caesar knew no U. That is not a detail, that is the key.

In Classical Latin the letter U did not exist. There were 23 letters. The V was two sounds at once: the vowel /u/ and the semivowel /w/. What we read as *Aduatuca*, Caesar wrote as **ADVATVCA**.

As long as you don't see that, you don't see the meaning either.

1. A fort without a fixed location

Caesar mentions it only once, in Book 6 of *De Bello Gallico*: the baggage of all legions is brought together at Aduatuca. *Id castelli nomen est. Hoc fere est in mediis Eburonum finibus* - that is the name of a fort, almost in the middle of the territory of the Eburones.

Whether it is **Aduatuca** or **Atuatuca** has been a point of contention for a hundred years. The oldest surviving manuscript of Caesar has *Aduatuca*. Linguist Maurits Gysseling thought *Atuatuca* was original and later became *Aduatuca* under Romance influence. Lauran Toorians argues exactly the opposite: the original Gaulish prefix *ad-* was hypercorrected by medieval copyists to *at-*, because they thought the *ad-* form had emerged under the influence of Old French.

But about the second half of the word, Toorians and the greatest Celtologists do agree.

2. The place of the prophet

In 2010 Toorians published his paper under a title that says it all: *Aduatuca, "place of the prophet"*.

The analysis comes from Xavier Delamarre, author of the *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise*:

According to Delamarre, it may be formed with the Gaulish suffix *ad-* ('towards') attached to the stem *uātu-* ('Vāti, soothsayer, seer, prophet') and the suffix *-cā*

A reconstructed original form **ad-uātu-cā* - literally "place of the soothsayer, where one goes to prophesy".

Uātu is not a random sound. It is the Celtic word for what in Latin is a **vates**: a seer, an initiate, a poet-prophet. Old Irish *fáith*, Welsh *gwawd*, Gaulish *vatis*.

So read it as Caesar wrote it:

AD - VATV - CA To - Vate - Place

3. And then Vati-ca

It is understandable that people want to avoid that association. As soon as you say *Vatican*, you hear Rome, power, religion. People prefer to keep Aduatuca local: Tongeren, the Eburones, a fort in the Kempen. Not a hill in Italy.

But the facts say something else.

Mons Vaticanus - the hill where St. Peter's now stands - has no clear Latin meaning. The oldest explanation already comes from the Romans themselves. Aulus Gellius and Varro derive the name from the oracle nature of the place.

Modern etymology says the same:

The name of the hill is believed to come from Latin *vaticinari* ("to prophesy"), apparently because there were prophets (*vates*) in that area

The Latin *vates* = prophet, seer, is the exact cousin of the Celtic *uātu / vate*. Even Augustine knew the discussion, although he tried to ridicule it.

Both words go back to the same Proto-Indo-European root *weh_2t-: to be inspired, to be possessed, to speak in ecstasy.

It is not a loan. It is not a conspiracy. It is a shared religious vocabulary from a time when there was no distinction yet between Celtic and Italic.

4. Why the V matters

As long as you write *Aduatuca* with a U and *Vatican* with a V, they seem like two worlds. Put the classical spelling back:

- **VATVCA**
- **VATICANVS**

Then you see it immediately. The same *vat-* core, the same *-ca* suffix that denotes a place in both languages.

So Toorians does not avoid the association. He exposes it. His whole point is that the Eburones were not a tribe without a language, but Celtic speakers whose central sanctuary was not a military depot, but an oracle site. A place where you went to the vate.

That people prefer not to make that link is human. Associating a fort of the Eburones in Limburg with the center of the Catholic Church feels anachronistic, even loaded.

But language is older than our sensitivities. And in this case the language says it very clearly:

And that is the crucial nuance. As an institution, the Vatican appears in history only hundreds of years after Caesar.

There is no direct historical line from Aduatuca to Vatican City. No Eburones who became Popes. What we are seeing is older than both.

What remains is language. Long before Rome was an empire and long before the Eburones were defeated, the Indo-European tribes on both sides of the Alps shared one word for a sacred figure: the inspired one, the *weh$_2$t-*. In Rome he became *vates*, on the Meuse he became *uātu*.

Caesar, who knew no U and wrote only V, preserved that word for us by accident. He wrote AD VATVCA.

It was never just a fort. It was always the place of the Vate. Just like Vaticanus.

Sources

- Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, VI.32 - *Aduatuca id castelli nomen est*
- Xavier Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise* (2003) - **ad-uātu-cā* = "place of the soothsayer"
- Lauran Toorians, *Aduatuca, "place of the prophet"* (2010) & debate on *ad-* vs *at-* as hypercorrection by copyists
- Etymology of *Mons Vaticanus* - from Latin *vaticinari / vates* "to prophesy"